



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
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Richland Operations
Office

DOE PRESS STATEMENT

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Information on Contaminated Rabbit at the Hanford Site

RICHLAND, Wash. – Employees working for Department of Energy contractor Washington Closure Hanford recently discovered rabbit droppings contaminated with radioactive cesium within a hundred yards of a facility demolished during environmental cleanup at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.

The material was found near a building that the contractor had recently demolished as part of the massive environmental cleanup effort at the 586-square-mile site that produced nuclear materials for the U.S. government from the 1940s to the late 1980s.

Out of the 18 rabbits surveyed to date, one rabbit was found to be contaminated. To prevent further intrusion into the site, workers fenced off the area, removed potential food sources, sprayed the perimeter with the scent of a predator animal to discourage burrowing, and covered areas of contamination to prevent animal intrusion.

“Our contractor took the correct actions to prevent the spread of contamination and keep it in the area around the building” said Joe Franco, Assistant Manager for the River Corridor, Department of Energy. “While this does not pose a worker safety or public health issue, we take our responsibility to prevent the spread of contamination seriously.”

Animals have long been known as a potential source for spreading contamination from cleanup debris. As a result, the Hanford Site has a robust animal control program. In 2009, personnel handled 26,000 animal control requests. Records for the same year indicate 33 contaminated animals or animal-related materials were discovered.

The primary purpose of Hanford cleanup is to prevent radioactive and hazardous materials from spreading by demolishing contaminated buildings and cleaning up waste sites, burial grounds and other potential sources of contamination. This would include the removal of any mechanisms that might lead to the spread of radioactive contamination, including animals.

The Washington State Department of Health offered this statement:

There is not a public health issue with the contaminated rabbit found on the Hanford Site. As a precaution, the Department of Health earlier this week surveyed areas that the public could potentially access at the site boundary and found no spread of contamination. The area outside of the site boundary is fairly remote and is not frequented by members of the public. It is not adjacent to a residential or commercial area.

As the agency responsible for public health and safety, the Department of Health has a responsibility to survey areas accessible by the general public. We found no spread of contamination. There is no evidence of a health threat.

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